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ABSTRACT

Persian language instructors at U.S. universities were surveyed regarding (1) their methods for measuring Persian language proficiency among American undergraduate students, (2) research verifying the validity and reliability of these methods, and (3) their definitions of Persian language proficiency. A 12-item questionnaire was completed by 17 Persian instructors. It was found that the respondents used diverse methods for assessing Persian language proficiency, that they have not conducted empirical research to verify these methods, and that they did not agree on a definition of Persian language proficiency. The respondents expressed willingness to conduct proficiency research and a need for additional learning materials. The questionnaire and a list of undergraduate Persian language programs in the United States are appended. (RW)

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CURRENT TRENDS IN MEASURING AMERICAN UNDERGRADUATES' PERSIAN LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

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U. S. Department of Education,
International Research and Studies Program
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Abstract

CURRENT TRENDS IN MEASURING AMERICAN UNDERGRADUATES' PERSIAN LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

The intention of this report was to identify what were the current assessment methods being used nationwide by the Persian instructors to measure the Persian language proficiency of their American undergraduate students, and to ascertain what research, if any, has been conducted to verify the valiiity and reliability of the assessment methods. Relatedly, this report also investigated what were the current attitudes among Persian instructors toward Persian language proficiency and future research needs relevant to Persian language proficiency.

To accomplish this study, a 12-item questionnaire was mailed to U.S. institutions of higher education with accredited undergraduate programs offering Persian language classes. Seventeen Persian instructors provided the data for this report. The response rate for this survey was 85 percent.

The quantitative data supported all the hypotheses of this report. First there were significant differences in the attitudes of Persian instructors toward an operational definition of Persian language proficiency. While the majority of the instructors perceived proficiency in Persian as an ability, the respondents did not agree upon the specific language skills for Persian proficiency. Secondly, the respondents reported using diversed methods to measure the proficiency of their students.

Regarding Persian proficiency research, virtually little empirical research has been conducted by the Persian instructors. For many of the instructors, intuition serves as hard data relative to their assessment methods. The majority of the respondents expressed willingness to contribute to further proficiency research. Most of the instructors prefer that additional learning materials be developed for the various levels of study.

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My appreciation is expressed to Dr. Iraj Bashiri, Dr. Gernot L. Windfuhr, and all the Persian instructors who contributed data for this survey.

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R. A.

Kalamazoo, Michigan
1983

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CURRENT TRENDS IN MEASURING AMERICAN UNDERGRADUATES' PERSIAN LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

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Second language proficiency is a popular, wide-ranging topic. Various theorists and practioners, each attempting to describe second language proficiency from the vantage of their discipline and idiosyncratic perspectives, have tended to study only parts of the phenomenon, concentrating mainly on the proficiency of children and adult learners whose second language is one of the modern foreign languages such as Spanish, French, German, or Russian. However, in recent years, the focus of some scholars and researchers has been on proficiency with uncommonly taught languages. These scholarly efforts have usually occurred in isolation of one another, with little opportunity for intra- or interdisciplinary sharing of theories, assumptions, information, or research data. Such is the case with the paucity of studies about Persian language proficiency. The major purpose of this paper is to provide a comprehensive report on the current evaluation methods, evaluation research, and the attitudes among Persian instructors toward assessment of Persian language proficiency of their American undergraduate students.

It is widely believed that second language proficiency is measurable. Evaluation of proficiency is also considered integral to the goals and guidelines for second language learning, instructional methods, and learning materials (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1982). Presently, different kinds of evaluation techniques abound; various criteria for proficiency measures also coexist (Lado, 1961; Vallette, 1967, 1981). Moreover, there is growing concern and demand for additional research and alternative strategies for measuring second language proficiency with uncommonly taught languages (President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies, 1977; Boufford, 1980; Department of Education, International Research and Studies Program, 1982).

The term "proficiency" or"تخصص (مهارت)" is not used within the contexts of available Persian learning materials. There is, though, an implicit notion that upon completion of the various exercises and drills, the learner will be able to speak, read, or write Persian to some degree. Persian instructors have been determining and describing the degree or level of proficiency attained by their American students. Except for the Persian Achievement Tests developed by Dr. Mehdi Marashi in 1974-75, not many details are known about contemporary Persian language proficiency research, nor about the format and content of the different proficiency measurements currently being used by Persian instructors nationwide. Although the current trends in Persian proficiency research and test methodology are inextricably bound with the Persian instructors' perspectives on proficiency, there is virtually no information about their attitudes toward proficiency.

Although Persian and English are part of the Indo-European classification of languages, both languages have little in common. For instance, American undergraduates who study Persian need to adjust to a different spatial orientation. Instead of starting from left to right, Persian is read and written with a modified version of the Arabic alphabet—quite different from the English alphabet. Moreover, Persian has been characterized as a "medium-hard" language for Americans to learn (Pei, 1966). From another perspective, Persian is regarded as an "easy" language (Mace, 1962, p. v) and "child's play" in comparison to studying Arabic (Engels, 1963, p. 260). Most learners with increased exposure to Persian tend to acquire "a certain working knowledge of Persian, the intricacies of Persian grammar have been consciously mastered by only a few, if any, foreigners"(Windfuhr, 1979, p. 9).

More data and information have been published about various aspects of the proficiency of adult native Farsi speakers who learn English as a second language than about the second language proficiency of American undergraduates who study Persian. The English proficiency research with native Farsi speakers, to date, has focused upon some of the problems Iranian students have with English verb forms (Manuchehri, 1974), English phonology (Leahy, 1980), as well as personal and linguistic factors which facilitate their proficiency in English (Monsohi-Tousi et al., 1980). Except for Dr. Marashi's (1975) testing project, Persian language proficiency has not been extensively investigated.

Over four centuries ago, the term "proficiency" was initially used to specify the level of fluency attained by an adult speaker of German (The Oxford English Dictionary, 1933, p. 1430). Since then, various scholars and researchers have been trying to discover how proficiency is attained; how to measure it; and what promotes, hinders, or delays the attainment of language proficiency. Nowadays proficiency is a popular descriptor which is still being used to designate the ultimate level or highest degree of achievement in language learning and usage. Although a majority of professionals agree that proficiency is attainable and measurable, the quest continues to further investigate second language proficiency with uncommonly taught languages.

The objectives of this report can be summarized in the following eight questions: (a) Is there professional consensus among Persian instructors about an operational definition of Persian language proficiency? (b) What methods are currently being used by Persian instructors to measure the proficiency of their American undergraduate students? (c) How frequently have the particular Persian proficiency measurements been used? (d) What kinds of language proficiency are presently being assessed by Persian instructors? (e) What empirical research, if any, has been completed relevant to investigating Persian proficiency measurement methods and American undergraduates' attainment of proficiency in Persian? (f) What types of feedback are being used to communicate information about the students' Persian language proficiency? (g) Is there any significant correlation between the American undergraduates' Persian proficiency score and their score for second language aptitude? (h) What are the current attitudes of Persian instructors toward research of Persian proficiency measurement methods and their students' proficiency in Persian? Relatedly, what do the Persian instructors consider to be the top priority need in future research of Persian language proficiency?

METHOD

Subjects. To accomplish the stated objectives of this report, an analytical survey was conducted. In October, 1982, a twelve-item questionnaire was prepared and mailed to 34 U.S. institutions of higher education which reportedly offered a Persian language program for American undergraduates. However, at the time of the survey, nearly a dozen of the Persian programs which were originally listed in the Linguistics Society of America's Directory of Programs in Linguistics in the U.S. & Canada (1982) had been terminated or were unresponsive to the mailed questionnaire and follow-up telephone calls. A total of 17 Persian instructors from among 20 instructors of Persian responded to the questionnaire. According to Dr. Earl R. Babbie (1973), this 85 percent response rate was sufficient to analyze the data and make conclusions regarding current measurement trends, research, and professional attitudes toward Persian language proficiency.

Instrument. The data for this report were obtained by means of a 12-item, self-administered questionnaire designed especially for this survey. Dr. Iraj Bashiri and Dr. Gernot L. Windfuhr, reknown experts in Persian language study, initially reviewed the content validity (Ary et al., 1972) of the questionnaire and its format. Based on their suggestions, a new two-page questionnaire with a dozen open-ended questions was duplicated and mailed to Persian instructors nationwide (see Appendix A).

Definite efforts were made to respect and protect the respondents' anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. No personal data such as name, age, etc. were requested. All the questionnaires which were returned would be kept for one year then shredded by the project director.

Procedures. On September 27, 1982, the survey questionnaires were mailed to 34 U.S. institutions of higher education reportedly offering Persian language study for American undergraduates. Persian instructors were requested to write their responses to all the questions then use the self-addressed stamped envelope to return their questionnaires by October 26, 1982. Ten Persian instructors had sent their questionnaires by the due date. Shortly thereafter a reminder letter along with another copy of the survey questionnaire were sent to each of the non-respondents. As Dr. Babbie (1973) suggested, a

telephone follow-up was made to urge the non-respondents to return their copies of the questionnaire.

Dr. Robert Brashear, the statistician for the project, calculated the response data. This report included both the qualitative and quantitative data from the respondents. Copies of this report were then mailed to the 17 Persian instructors who have supplied the survey data. The respondents were asked to review and comment on the contents of this report.

Data Analysis. Descriptive techniques were used in analyzing the various responses to the survey questionnaire items. As Dr. Fred Kerlinger (1973) pointed out, descriptive statistics help to make the quantitative data meaningful.

Results. The intent of this report was to investigate the current 1982-83 trends in the methods of assessment being used by Persian instructors to measure the Persian language proficiency of their undergraduate students; to ascertain what research has been conducted to establish the reliability and validity of their assessment methods and research related to attainment of proficiency in Persian; and to determine the Persian instructors' attitudes toward an operational definition of Persian language proficiency and toward further research relevant to Persian language proficiency.

The results of the analytical survey have been tabulated and summarized, and, where appropriate, the Persian instructors' response rates to each questionnaire item have been presented in separate tables. The various tables show the responses to the questionnaire items and how many of the 17 Persian instructors wrote the responses.

Table 1 provides a detailed summary of the definitions given for Persian language proficiency. As anticipated, these data support the original hypothesis that there were significant differences in the attitudes of Persian instructors toward an operational definition of Persian language proficiency. An operational definition is one that enumerates all the different subdimensions and variables of a concept into observable events (Ary et al., 1972; Babbie, 1973). In contrast, a constitutive type of definition merely conveys

the general nature of the concept but fails to precisely identify the observable and measurable variables. Essentially, an operational definition includes an accurate description of specific overt behaviors, tasks, and behavioral criteria relevant to the concept being defined.

Along the left margin of Table 1 there are four categories—the main parts of the operational definitions for Persian language proficiency, namely, definition, specific proficiency skills, proficiency criteria, and proficiency levels. The data shown are the various written definitions for Persian language proficiency. Throughout Table 1 the descriptor "not specified" is used to indicate that the instructors did not provide or include some information. Only two Persian instructors did not write anything for this particular item.

The numbers featured in Table 1 are tallies of the instructors' responses showing how many of the instructors gave the particular answer. For example, one Persian instructor considered Persian language proficiency to be "command" of specific language skills: "grammar, read, write, and speak." The criteria used to indicate whether an undergraduate student attained proficiency was demonstration of the four language skills "without substantial help of a formal program or tutor and without frequent use of the dictionary."

The majority of the Persian instructors, eight out of seventeen, defined proficiency in Persian as an "ability." The term "ability" is widely used in scholarly discussions and in the professional literature to define and describe second language proficiency. In total, three of the Persian instructors defined Persian proficiency only in terms of specific language skills. One instructor defined proficiency in Persian as "active mastery" of "phonology, syntax, grammar, lexicon, and the Persian writing system." Two other instructors considered Persian language proficiency to be the same as proficiency with other languages.

Regarding specific proficiency skills shown in Table 1, the instructors' lists were diverse. There was a range from one to five different skills.

The majority of the Persian instructors tended to include speaking and reading Persian in their definition of proficiency. Two instructors considered Persian grammar to be one of the major skills for Persian proficiency. One instructor also listed culture literacy along with the four skills of speaking, reading, writing, and comprehending to be major skills contributing to Persian language proficiency. Another instructor mentioned the ability to translate the language as a proficiency skill.

There tends to be consensus among the majority of the Persian instructors that there are performance standards for judging whether undergraduate students are proficient in Persian. The criteria ranges from general standards such as "independent" and "near native speaker" to more specific standards as demonstrating the language skills in Persian "without the substantial" reliance upon teacher, learning materials, or dictionaries.

One of the instructors referred to the standards recently established by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages and endorsed by the Interagency Language Roundtable. Their proficiency criteria model (1980) has been used by the federal government and academicians as the yardstick for foreign language proficiency. For oral proficiency the ACTFL/ILR model consists of five major levels of proficiency: elementary, limited working, professional, distinguished, and native or bilingual proficiency. The model identified specific criteria per type of proficiency. There is also a set of criteria for the speaker who has "no practical proficiency."

In Table 1 the majority of the respondents did not describe the levels of proficiency. Except for the ACTFL/ILR model referred to in the previous paragraph, three of the instructors mentioned levels which reflected their class divisions: beginner or elementary, intermediate, and advanced. One of the Persian instructors specified the levels of proficiency as "ranging from knowledge of a few phrases to near native speaker ability."

TABLE 1 PERSIAN INSTRUCTORS' DEFINITIONS OF PERSIAN LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Definitions:	Command	Active Mastery	Same as Other Languages	Not Specified				Ability					
Total Responses:	1	1	2	5				3					
Proficiency Criteria:	Grammar Read Write Speak	Phonology Syntax Grammar Lexicon Writing System	Same as Other Languages	Speak	Comprehend Speak	Speak Comprehend Read Write Culture	Not Specified	Speak Comprehend Read	Speak Read Write	Speak Read Write Comprehend	Read Write Speak	Read Comprehend Speak Write Translate	Read Comprehend
Total Responses:	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	2	2	1	1	1
Proficiency Criteria:	Without substantial help of formal program or tutor; without frequent use of dictionary	Not Specified	Same as Other Languages	Carry on elementary conversation	Independently	ACTFL/ILR (1980) model	Not Specified	Department's research objectives; handle unglossed texts	Independently	Without extensive need for instructor, coaching or dictionaries	Educated native speaker	Near native speaker	with dictionary & texts
Total Responses:	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	2	2	1	1	1
Proficiency Levels:	Not Specified	Not Specified	Same as Other Languages	Elementary level	Not Specified	ACTFL/ILR (1980) model	Not Specified	1st& 2nd year	Not Specified	Beginner Intermediate Advance	Not Specified	Ranges from knowledge of few phrases to near native speaker ability	Not Specified
Total Responses	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	2	2	1	1	1

The diversity of opinions in defining Persian language proficiency tends to be reflected in the ways Persian instructors measure proficiency with their students. The data in Table 2 support the hypothesis that there are significant differences in the kinds of measurement methods currently being used by Persian instructors to assess the language proficiency of their American undergraduate students who study the language. The majority of the instructors reported that they use teacher-made tests. Two instructors did not mention any details about their measurement methods. One instructor answered the item stating that "a test" was administered "to see how well they do," however, no further details were included about the test. Only one instructor reported using standardized tests, namely, the Persian Achievement Tests. Thirteen Persian instructors identified various teacher-made tests. The interview method seemed to be used by many instructors to measure proficiency.

TABLE 2 PERSIAN PROFICIENCY MEASUREMENT METHODS

Persian Proficiency Measurement Methods:	Not Specified	Test	Standardize Test	Teacher-made Tests						
Total Responses:	2	1	1	13						
Kinds of Measurements:	Not Specified	Not Specified	Persian Achievement Tests & A5-15 min. interview	Written	Written & Oral	Interview	Taped	Oral Written Read	Interview with educated native speaker	Read
Total Responses:	2	1	1	3	2	4	1	1	1	1

Table 3 shows some additional details about the content of the various proficiency assessments being used and how often the assessments are administered. The proficiency of American undergraduates tends to be measured with materials which are familiar to the students. In some cases, the students are also tested on unfamiliar texts or information. Persian instructors reported that they use their tests on a regular basis (formative evaluation) to assess proficiency. Some of the instructors stated that they only make final evaluations (summative evaluation) of their students' proficiency in Persian.

TABLE 3 TESTS CONTENTS & EVAULATION SCHEDULES

Tests Contents:		Familiar Material				Unfamiliar Material		Not Specified
Total Responses:		6				2		9
Types of Materials:	Texts	Readings	Questions	Conversation units	Personal Experiences	Readings	Not Specified	Not Specified
Total Responses	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	9

Evaluation Schedules:	Formative (frequently)	Summative (final only)	Not Specified
Total Responses:	3	8	6

Regarding the reliability of the various proficiency measurement methods currently being used by the Persian instructors, nine instructors reported that they "did not know" whether other instructors or colleagues were using their particular methods to assess Persian proficiency. One of the instructors stated that a "colleague at another university had administered the same test and evaluated it jointly." Another instructor pointed out that "several others seemed to think that it [the test] works." Three of the instructors did not write an answer to this questionnaire item. In response to the inquiry about the reliability of their assessment methods, three instructors mentioned various agencies which used the same kinds of testing and ratings for proficiency. The agencies cited were: Foreign Service Institute, Princeton University, and the National Association of Self-instructional Programs.

Table 4 presents the data about the validity of the various Persian proficiency measurement methods. Ten of the instructors did not make any comments about their tests results. Seven of the Persian instructors considered their measurement methods to be quite adequate. None of the respondents expressed any dissatisfaction with their proficiency tests.

TABLE 4 PERSIAN INSTRUCTORS' EVALUATION OF THEIR PROFICIENCY METHODS

Evaluations:	Very Good	Very Positive	Good	Satisfactory	Not Specified
Total Responses:	3	1	2	1	10

Most of the measurement methods used to assess Persian language proficiency have been used for a decade or longer. The data in Table 5 show the number of years the proficiency tests have been utilized by the various instructors. The Persian instructors who specified the length of usage did not clarify whether they revised their methods periodically or just recycled their methods for the new learners. Eight of the instructors did not state how long they used their assessment methods. Six instructors of Persian reported using their proficiency measurement methods for ten or more years.

TABLE 5 NUMBER OF YEARS

Years:	Over a Decade	Decade	Three Years	Less than a year	Not Specified
Total Response:	4	2	2	1	8

Table 6 shows the unanimous negative responses shared by the 17 instructors regarding language aptitude testing. The Persian instructors were asked to report any significant differences they found between the scores their students attained in language aptitude and Persian proficiency. All the instructors seem to consider this particular item to be irrelevant to proficiency in Persian. However, Dr. Rebecca M. Valette (1980) points out that students who achieve high language aptitude scores tend to learn a new language "more readily" than students with lower scores. The 17 Persian instructors did not require nor use language aptitude scores in predicting their students' attainment of proficiency in Persian.

TABLE 6 LANGUAGE APTITUDE TESTING

Language Aptitude Testing.	Not Required	Not Used
Total Responses:	17	17

So far, the data, which have been presented, provide relevant information on the current state-of-the-art in Persian language proficiency measurement methods. Another portion of the survey questionnaire was devoted to an investigation of the Persian instructors' attitudes toward further Persian language proficiency research.

There were diverse opinions among the 17 Persian instructors regarding which topics or areas need further research and investigation relevant to Persian language proficiency. In Table 7 the data support the hypothesis that there would be significant differences in the attitudes of Persian instructors toward empirical research which should be conducted. The majority of the instructors preferred the development of Persian teaching materials, particularly for advanced learners and for composition skills. Only one instructor expressed interest in preparing Persian proficiency tests and a test for Persian culture literary.

TABLE 7 RESEARCH NEEDS

Needs:	Curriculum development	Workshop	Persian Teaching Materials							Proficiency Tests		Not Specified
Total Responses:	1	1	8							2		5
Specific Topics:	Persian programs	Nationwide meeting to discuss & determine skills for Persian proficiency	Elementary & intermediate materials	Advanced Learning Materials	Modern Colloquial Persian	Textbooks & tapes on Persian syntax	Texts & video tapes on Persian social behaviors, strategies & culture	Composition Texts	Frequency study of lexical items & grammar structures for the graded materials	for the four language skills & culture literacy	for each learning level	Not Specified
Total Responses:	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	5

In addition to the identification of specific research needs, the 17 Persian instructors were also asked to state whether they would cooperate in future research projects about Persian language proficiency; and to specify what contributions they were willing to make to proficiency research. As shown in Table 8 the majority of the 17 Persian instructors expressed interest in making various contributions in further investigations and studies of Persian language proficiency. Three instructors did not want to be involved in research. Three other instructors stated their willingness to contribute to proficiency research but they did not specify in what capacity or area of study.

TABLE 8 CONTRIBUTIONS OF PERSIAN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTORS

Persian Instructors' Willingness to Contribute to Persian Proficiency Research:	Total Responses:
Willingness:	
Yes	14
No	3
Specific Contributions:	
Develop Proficiency Tests	2
Develop Persian Teaching Materials	8
Provide Syntactic Frame	1
Not Specified	6

An item was included on the survey questionnaire to ascertain what the current methods were for reporting the Persian proficiency level to students and prospective employers who may want to know that information. The respondents listed a variety of methods for proficiency feedback. Table 9 shows which methods are presently being used for students and their future employers. The majority of the respondents stated that they did not prepare information for prospective employers.

TABLE 9 PERSIAN PROFICIENCY FEEDBACK METHODS IN USE

Feedback Methods:	Total Responses:
Feedback for Students:	
Grades	6
Error correction	3
Personal counseling	2
Students' performance	2
Not specified	4
Feedback for Employers:	
Letter of recommendation	6
Employers' rating forms	1
Not specified	10

Three additional kinds of data were collected relevant to the state-of-the-art in measuring and researching Persian proficiency. First, the respondents indicated whether they were native or non-native speakers of Persian and whether they were trained language instructors. Table 10 presents the data of the instructors qualifications. The majority of the Persian instructors are non-native speakers who are trained language professionals. No other demongraphical data were collected.

TABLE 10 PERSIAN INSTRUCTORS' PROFILE

Persian Instructors' Profile:	Total Responses:
Native Speaker of Persian	4
Non-native Speaker of Persian	12
Not Specified	1
Trained Language Instructors	15
Self-trained Language Instructor	1
Not Specified	1

A major assumption regarding language proficiency is that the testing and rating of proficiency are integral to the instructional methods, curriculum, teaching materials and learning objectives (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1982). Currently the Persian instructors are using a variety of texts and materials in their classes for Persian. Table 11 displays the titles and descriptions of the teaching materials. The majority of the instructors tend to use commercially available texts.

TABLE 11 PERSIAN TEACHING MATERIALS

Persian Teaching Materials:	Total Responses:
Textbooks Elementary Level:	
Iraj Bashiri. Persian for beginners: Pronunciation and writing.	1
Iraj Bashiri. Persian syntax.	1
Foreign Service Persian.	1
Michael C. Hillman. Fundamentals of Persian reading and writing.	1
Michael C. Hillman. Colloquial Persian.	1
Mehdi Marashi. Let's read Persian.	
Donald L. Stilo & Jerome W. Clinton. Spoken and written modern Persian: An elementary text.	2
Manochehr Sottodeh. Persian for English speaking people I.	1
W.N. Thackson. An introduction to Persian.	1
Gernot L. Windfuhr & Hassan Tehranisa. Modern Persian elementary level.	4
Spoken Persian.	1
Textbooks Intermediate Level:	
Michael C. Hillman. A Persian reader.	1
Mehdi Marashi. A self-instructional course in reading and writing Persian.	1
M. Mazzaoui & William Millward. Social and cultural selections from contemporary Persia.	1
Manochehr Sottodeh. Persian for English speaking people.II.	1
Gernot L. Windfuhr & Shapour Bostanbakhsh. Modern Persian intermediate level.	6
Textbooks for Advanced Level:	
R. Avery et al. Modern Persian reader III.	1
Classical texts.	1
Firdawsi. Shahnameh.	1
Nizam ol Molk. Siyasatnameh-Mazadak story.	1
Sa'adi. Gulistan.	1
Tapes:	
Iraj Bashiri. Persian for beginners: Pronunciation and writing. Tapes and audio-visual slides.	1
Mehdi Marashi. Let's read Persian. Tapes.	1
Gernot L. Windfuhr & Hassan Tehranisa. Modern Persian elementary level. Tapes.	1
Mehdi Marashi. Tapes for Self-instructional course in reading and writing Persian.	1
Spoken Persian. 30 Tapes.	1

TABLE 11 PERSIAN TEACHING MATERIALS (continued)

Persian Teaching Materials:	Total Responses:
Teacher-made Materials:	
Elementary level	3
Intermediate level	3

The total responses for Table 11 far exceed the total of 17. The Persian instructors reported using various combinations of texts and tapes, texts only, or teaching materials and other texts for the levels of Persian taught at their institute of higher education.

Persian is one of the uncommonly taught languages which American undergraduates are studying. To gain a perspective on the number of Americans enrolled in Persian classes, the instructors listed how many undergraduates were taking classes at the various levels of study. The enrollment survey is limited only to the 1980's. Table 12 summarizes the enrollment figures as well as the types of learning opportunities which are available to American undergraduates who want to study Persian. The majority of the American undergraduates who study Persian do so in a traditional classroom setting; however, there is a trend toward alternative learning settings such as directed studies and reading programs as well as self-instructional programs.

The enrollment for American undergraduates is very limited. For example, in 1980, nine institutions enrolled ten or less students in Elementary/Beginners class; four institutions reported an enrollment from eleven to twenty students; and three institutions enrolled twenty-one or more students.

Recent geopolitical developments in the Middle East, particularly in Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, have underscored the significance of the Persian language in terms of the future of the national security and economic growth of the United States within those countries where Persian is a native language (U.S. Congressional Subcommittee of Postsecondary Education, 1981). The student enrollment in the U.S. for Persian study remains stable without drastic

increases or decreases in the various levels of Persian study. One instructor reported that there were more foreign students (Arabs and Latin Americans) studying Persian than Americans, especially at the elementary level. The same instructor pointed out that more Iranians were enrolled in the upper-division Persian classes than Americans. The majority of the Persian instructors did not mention this enrollment trend.

TABLE 12 ENROLLMENT FOR PERSIAN LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

1980

Level:	Number of Students			
	1-10	11-20	21+	Total Programs:
Elementary/Beginning	9	4	3	16
Intermediate	12	4	0	16
Advanced	7	1	1	9
Directed Studies/Readings	7	0	0	7
Other	2	1	0	3

1981

Level:	Number of Students			
	1-10	11-20	21+	Total Programs:
Elementary/Beginning	12	4	1	17
Intermediate	11	1	1	13
Advanced	4	1	1	6
Directed Studies/Readings	5	0	0	5
Other	1	0	0	1

1982

Level:	Number of Students			
	1-10	11-20	21+	Total Programs:
Elementary/Beginning	6	5	1	12
Intermediate	10	0	0	10
Advanced	8	0	0	8
Directed Studies/Readings	6	0	0	6
Other	1	0	0	1

Discussion. At the onset of this project, one of the major concerns was obtaining sufficient data. Since most Persian instructors have not published details about proficiency in Persian, it was anticipated that they would be reluctant to answer the survey about Persian proficiency. In order to obtain their cooperation, no demographic data were requested from Persian instructors. Along with the questionnaires, postage-paid, self-addressed envelopes were sent to them. The instructors volunteered their time to answer the survey.

Although efforts were made to involve all Persian instructors teaching American undergraduates, no accurate information was available regarding existing Persian programs. The College Blue Book(1981), The College Handbook(1982), Peterson's Annual Guide to Undergraduate Study(1982)listed only the University of California at Berkeley to offer Persian programs. Although other U.S. institutions of higher education include Persian language programs, they were not listed in such directories.

To complicate the search for Persian programs, some of the programs have been terminated but are still published in the directories as existing Persian programs. For instance, the Linguistics Society of America's Directory of Linguistics Programs in the U.S. and Canada(1982) continued to list numerous defunct Persian programs such as the ones at Western Michigan University, Cleveland State University, University of Hawaii, Stanford University, and others.

Although the survey questionnaire was carefully reviewed for content validity, a few of the Persian instructors included additional comments about the wording and relevancy of some the questionnaire items. The questions for the survey were deliberately formulated as open-ended questions so as not to bias or influence the instructors' responses. Even though some of the questionnaires were returned partially completed, the project director decided to include in the final tabulation of the data. In summation,

this study attempted to ascertain what has already been done regarding the measurement of Persian proficiency and what needs to be done to facilitate proficiency in Persian.

The results of the survey indicated that the Persian instructors, who participated in this survey, did not concur on how to define Persian language proficiency. While the majority of the respondents agreed that proficiency was an ability, there was no consensus on what specific language skills an undergraduate student needed for proficiency in Persian. Most of the instructors tended to identify various skill combinations such as speak, read, and write; another popular combination was speak, comprehend, and read Persian.

Persian proficiency tends to be measured by Persian instructors in various ways. Mainly, teacher-made tests have been administered on a formative or summative basis to determine whether American undergraduate students have attained proficiency in the target language. Interview and written tests were the most popular methods for assessing Persian proficiency.

None of the Persian instructors used the terms "reliability" or "validity" to describe or discuss their measurement methods. For the most part, Persian instructors seem to rely upon their own intuition to decide whether their methods are reliable in measuring proficiency. A few Persian instructors reported that they were using methods which have been researched by others. Except for Dr. Marashi (1975), the other Persian instructors have not published details or data about their asessment methods.

Regarding further research about Persian proficiency, most of the Persian instructors expressed interest in the endeavor. Overall, their main concern was for the development of Persian teaching materials for the different learning levels. The respondents tended to focus on materials as well as guidelines, not specifically on behavioral research to investigate factors contributing to proficiency or problems American students have in attaining proficiency.

Conclusion. In summary, this survey has found the following:

1. The Persian professionals, who participated in this survey, did not concur on an operational definition of Persian language proficiency. Specifically, they did not agree on what proficiency is, nor on what Persian language skills are needed for proficiency in Persian.

2. Many of the respondents to this survey still make assessment decisions based on speculation rather than on the basis of empirical grounds.

3. The Persian instructors, who contributed data for this report, use diverse methods to measure the proficiency of their American undergraduate students who study the language. Their proficiency tests vary in content, format, and skill area.

4. The majority of the instructors agree that additional research about Persian proficiency is warranted; however, they did not concur on what should be investigated. Most of the respondents preferred that more teaching materials should be developed for the various learning levels. The other research topics mentioned by the instructors of Persian are: the development of a Persian proficiency test; development of a Persian culture literacy test; nationwide workshop for Persian instructors to identify and define Persian language proficiency; and evaluation of Persian language programs.

APPENDIX A

Persian Proficiency Questionnaire

QUESTIONNAIRE
CURRENT TRENDS IN MEASURING AMERICAN UNDERGRADUATES' PERSIAN LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

DIRECTIONS: Please answer all the questions. If necessary, use the back of the questionnaire form. Return the questionnaire by October 26, 1982.

1. What levels of Persian are taught in your program and how many American undergraduates are enrolled in each:

COURSE	NUMBER OF UNDERGRADS ENROLLED		
	1980	1981	1982
Elementary/Beginning Persian	___	___	___
Intermediate Persian	___	___	___
Advanced Persian	___	___	___
Directed Studies/Readings in Persian	___	___	___
Other (Please specify)	___	___	___

2. What are the particular textbooks, teaching materials, and audio-visual means used?

3. What, in your opinion, is Persian language proficiency?

4. How do you determine language proficiency? How do you apply your concept of language proficiency in gauging the proficiency of your students in Persian?

5. How often have you used the method(s) and procedure(s) explained in (2) and with what results?

6. Has anyone else used this method(s) of assessment of proficiency? When? Would you like to share their reactions?

7. Do your American undergraduates studying Persian complete a language aptitude test before admission into the Persian class? If so, which test is used?

8. Are there any significant differences in the students' scores for language aptitude and language proficiency?

9. What type of feedback do you provide for your students, their prospective employers, and others regarding the students' proficiency in Persian?

10. What, in your opinion, are the top research topics underlying a sound program of instruction in Persian leading to a reasonable degree of proficiency for the undergraduate level?

11. Are you willing to contribute to research leading to a sound program of instruction and a reliable battery of tests for proficiency? What can you contribute in this area?

12. Are you a native speaker of Persian? Are you a trained language instructor?

APPENDIX B

Undergraduate Persian Language Programs in the U.S.

Undergraduate Persian Language Programs in the U.S.

College:

Boston College, Chesnut Hill, Massachusetts

Universities:

University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona
University of California at Berkeley, Berkeley, California
University of California at San Diego, La Jolla, California
Columbia University
John Hopkins University, Maryland
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Urbana-Champaign, Illinois
Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan
University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota
State University of New York at Buffalo, Buffalo, New York
Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio
University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey
Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas
University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah
University of Washington, Seattle, Washington
University of Wisconsin at Madison, Madison, Wisconsin

APPENDIX C

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